

POETRY

K.V. Raghupathi

Images of Afghanistan, the Fallen Angel

I

They dragged him out from the dusted car,
hands tied to his back,
made to lie down on his belly with his face facing the west.
They wanted him to be in the country,
but he wanted to flee the battered country.
The woman accompanied him kneeled and prayed,
but they shot him on the back of his chest at dusk and stole her
amidst the pandemonium of birds and roaming dogs;
while the helpless men and children rented the air *Allaho Akbar*.
Is life worth living to die at the nozzle for no crime?

II

Like scared rats, they rushed to the airport,
all to flee from gunshots.
There were no rules on the tarmac and the runway.
Soon, the airport was transformed into an old railway station
and the stranded flights like trains to pick up the tyrannized.
They scrambled like the flood victims for food,
some squatted on the wings, some hung to the wheels,
some held whatever their hands could,
yet hundreds ran with the moving flight
as though escorting the wounded Freedom.
The flight took off, the pilots unmindful
throwing off the people on the wings
like fireballs
to fall to their death from the sky.
Freedom was so elusive,
it flew with the wings,

off in the sky and then vanished like a falcon
in the thick ashy clouds that partly concealed the bleeding mountains.

III

Twenty years of hard-won freedom
flew away like a paper kite in the sky.
Is freedom so fleecy as cloud?
Only the boom of bullets, the shrieks of shells
in the battered valley heard.
On the roads and in the streets, gun-toting men with flowing black beards and headgear
roamed like hunting greyhounds let loose from the cages
shouting 'death to the disobedient'.
Where are the pigeons that cooed in the morning light?
Only the doves are making shrill sad calls.
Where are the smiling strutting women on the roads?
Only the street dogs are howling
Will the hard-won freedom return to the tainted Hindukush mountains and valleys?

IV

Not one or two, but tens and tens
babies were thrown over the razor wire like food packets to the quake victims.
But this one baby, tender as red cherry
hard to cry and open eyes
to see the country in blood
landed in the hands of a British woman soldier.
Its mother fled in fright ducking past gunfire
to save her skin, she thinks right what she did.
Its separated father lost in the melee
in the fall of freedom like a paradise lost.
Soon, the booming of flights in the sky ceased,
the abandoned machinery like mute witnesses in the war memorial
as the gun-toting bearded men in *peraahan tunbaan* outfit
with the blood smudged knitted blankets across their shoulders
roam the tarmac like lost messiahs.
Kabul airport is no more the gateway to freedom.

V

Crowded, the airport looked like a confusing marketplace.
People jostling and surging with wheeled suitcases,
mothers like langurs holding their babies, children clutching their fathers
refused to return to their abandoned homes
to fall prey to the tuft of bullets.

The night before he sat by her bedside and felt
 the dropping pulse as the city is caught in the flue
 with the temperature rising like the summer sun on the sub-Sahara.
 Kabul like patient bleeding with no doctor in the vicinity
 to stitch the split skin and bones.

The other day, a couple of months ago
 the trees fell by thunderbolts,
 now, men with bullets in veins are falling
 as women shut peeping through the slit doors and windows
 the gruesome terror, burning like the tropical forest fire.

How long does it take to dissolve the hard-earned freedom in the grave?
 The little girl asked the passer-by in askance.
 Can you show me a place where sleep and silence merge?
 Can you show me a house where there is no anchorage for grief?

About the Poet

A former academic, poet, short story writer, novelist, book reviewer, critic besides a staunch yoga practitioner K.V. Raghupathi (1957) holds a PhD in English Literature and has published twelve poetry collections, two short story collections, two novels, eight critical/edited books besides five books on Yoga and numerous stimulating and thought-provoking articles in various international journals, both online and print. His poetry collections include, *Desert Blooms* (1987), *Echoes Silent* (1988), *The Images of a Growing Dying City* (1989), *Small Reflections* (2000), *Voice of the Valley* (2003, 2014), *Wisdom of the Peepal Tree* (2003, 2014), *Samarpana* (2006), *Orphan and Other Poems* (2010), *Dispersed Symphonies* (2010), *Between Me and the Babe* (2015), *On and Beyond the Surface* (2018), and *The Mountain is Calling...* (2019); two novels: *The Invalid* (2014) and *The Disappointed* (2015); two short story collections: *The Untouchable Piglet* (2017) and *A Gay and a Straight Woman* (2018). His poetry is rooted in the abundance of philosophy, nature, transcendentalism, imagery and social perspectives, and is replete with similes, metaphors, personifications, apostrophes, irony, climax, anti-climax and full of rhetoric and symbols. More often he takes the readers on the spiritual exploration of radical philosophical thoughts which strongly speak throughout all the collections. He is a recipient of several awards for his creativity at the national level that include Michael Madhusudan Dutt Award (Kolkata, 2000), H. D. Thoreau Writing Fellowship (Mysore, 2001), Best Chosen Poet for 2003 (Mumbai, 2003), Lifetime Achievement Award in Poetry (Chennai Poetry Circle, 2010), Rock Pebbles National Award for Creativity (Bhubaneswar, 2014), King Phrasal Arbind Chowdhury Award for Poetry (Parbhani, 2018), and a Citation of Brightest Honour, International Sufi Centre (2020) besides Lifetime Achievement Award in Yoga and Best Yogic Publication Award (Bengaluru, 2018). He lives at Tirupati, AP. Email: drkvraghupathi@gmail.com